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"And what rough beast its hour come round at last . . ."—*William Butler Yeats*

THE CHIMERA

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The Age of Pericles

By Kenneth Patchen



O fields of the sun!
O then in flower
The standing man and the image
Of his talk like a white bird
Bathing in the pools of morning.

These are the friends of the sun.
They rest love—
The white bird lying between us.

All in the shoals wonder finds
Its golden fish. I do walk now
In each green and life of love. O
This crude flesh is small
In my world— Clad in levels
As a child asleep, I put robes
Over the sun. For the sun is a womb
And the mother of other worlds
Than this. Something defiles
The white bird lying between us.

Love shall have rest, and the Greek
Decide against his other Athens.

The Juggler's Dance

A NOTE ON CRANE AND RIMBAUD

By Wallace Fowlie



I

THE form of love which is threatened or condemned is the only form treated in literature. The passion of love always maintains its primitive meaning which is that of suffering. There seems to be no variation from this principle in the history of Western literature between the legend of Tristan and the novel of Proust. The art of the story, when contrasted with the art of the poem, resembles the quiet and immobility of a tomb because in a story the banalities and actions of life are constantly cloaking the experience of love. Man can't love without living, except in a poem. And it has to be a certain kind of poem: that heightened burning expression of a metaphor which is love shorn of every lesser feeling and lesser act. So even in *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* the "story" is always intervening and threatening the fullness of the juggler's passion. So also in religious poets like Hopkins and Claudel, where their love of God is often experienced in His entire created universe, the art becomes more purely song or contemplation. Between the "narrative" of love and the "celebration" of love arising from some projection of God's created beauty, both of which represent a kind of peace or triumphant unity, lies the poem which neither narrates nor celebrates love, but which is closer to being love because it condenses passion into an image. The experience of its composition, of its very construction, is love—and therefore the poem doesn't have to talk "about" love; and it can't celebrate love because it has found no peace. This is the poetry of Maurice Scève, of Rimbaud, of Hart Crane.

Crane committed suicide in 1932 at the age of thirty-three. His was the artistic temperament thrown against the typical background of American bourgeois living. Ohio, Chicago, New York were the principal settings of his life; the separation of his mother and father was the drama of his early years; his nature: introverted, secretive, capable of revealing itself only to very few friends, sensitive to brilliant colors and beauty—fixed upon the profound problems of existence and happiness, and felt itself thwarted at every effort to achieve harmony and belief. He kept odd jobs in order to earn a living and continue his writing. In Greenwich Village he became acquainted with the fashionable literary currents and with the so-called “little magazines.” From a moral viewpoint his life disintegrated in excesses of violence and debauchery. Sexual aberration and drunkenness were the pitfalls in which his spirit wrestled with a kind of desperation. His art became increasingly difficult as his personal life became more and more imbedded in dilemma, more and more twisted by what Crane himself called “the love of things irreconcilable.”¹

He was honest with himself in his violence, honest in his flights to the waterfront dives, honest in the new excessive experience with which the writing of a poem provided him. There seemed to be no escape from his passionate drama, no saving flight from his desires. In his poetry there is perhaps only one theme capable of being interpreted as that of hope or solution or sublimation. It is the theme of the sea and the sea-spell. The title of Crane's most ambitious poem, *The Bridge*, seems to indicate the symbol of that power in man which can join the finite to the infinite. The sea, which he calls in one of his poems “this great wink of eternity”² points to some other world or to some other worldliness. It is the objectification of the poet's persistent nos-

¹ For the *Marriage of Faustus and Helen*. Mr. Roger Shattuck, an undergraduate at Yale and now in the Army Air Corps, has published in *The Yale Literary Magazine*, winter 1943, an excellent analysis of this poem.

² *Voyages II*. Miss Ankey Larrabee, recently a student at Bennington College, has published in *Accent*, winter 1943, a brief but penetrating interpretation of Crane's *Voyages*.

talgia for another universe and for a peace which the known universe was unable to give him.

For Crane, as for Melville, under the waves and under the gulfs resound the purest hosannahs. All voices there merge into "one song." Over it, the bridge, a kind of "curveship," lends to God the myth of man. In a sense, then, the bridge is the intercessor and mediator for Hart Crane, the modern mechanistic counterpart of the Virgin who, like Brooklyn Bridge—contemplated by the poet as the statue was contemplated by the juggler in the mediaeval poem—is "sleepless" and "condenses eternity."

Throughout the various sections of *The Bridge*, images and flashes of phrases constantly recall the cult of the Virgin, her purity, her eternity, her preeminent role of mediatrix. The secret action of Our Lady on obscure and grotesque lives, the action of her prayers and intercession which is revealed in minute flashes appearing in some of the darkest and most mysterious passages of modern poetry, is a subject of wonderment and speculation. In innumerable examples the Middle Ages taught this power of Mary to consecrate the simplest and even the most deformed work as well as to consecrate a sinful life. As the early Italian painters were entranced with the problem of painting in the same figure the traits of a mother and a virgin, so the modern poets (cf. Hopkins, Claudel, Rilke, Eliot, Crane) have been held and intrigued with the dual nature of Mary: her divinity, the rôle she plays as queen of heaven, and her humanity, the infinite comprehension she has of all the problems of the sons of men.

One entire stanza in the prologue to *The Bridge* could almost come from the litany or some liturgical chant:

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry.

The first section itself of the poem is called *Ave Maria*, in which Crane presents the character Columbus who symbolizes the beginning of the cultural myth of America. The ocean is designated

as an "amplitude that time explores," but the solitary man Columbus who faces it, equals it with his faith. Columbus invokes the Mother of God for the safe return of his ships:

Assure us through thy mantle's ageless blue!

and his prayer equates the span of water as it disappears in space and is comprehended by the mind of peace which some men possess.

In *Southern Cross*, another section of *The Bridge*, Crane converts the universal myth of Columbus and America into the personal tragedy of the poet. This is Crane's love song to the woman he is unable to name. The namelessness of his love is God: he calls it thus,—and it is stretched across the southern sky as well as across the phosphor wake of his boat. Yet the names of three women flash out from the tragic namelessness of the poet's night:

Eve! Magdalene!
or Mary, you?

This litany is a question, timorous, half-formed, ill-articulated, lost in the noise of the churning waters and the endless expanse of the sky. But the poet, in the formulation of his well-nigh inaudible litany, moves out from a total solitude and namelessness to an apprehension of the namelessness of Mary which is on another level. It is perhaps more on this page than on others that Crane's human suffering attains a mystical justification.

Hart Crane is the American poet of the sea, as well as the poet of steel and soil. He lacked the heritage of an intellectual or religious system of thought, which in the case of major poets such as Dante, Milton, Eliot, Yeats, serves as sustenance or background for their personal and their poetic experience. Crane was more alone. The final despair which overcame him was the logical result of his solitude, his oneness, his isolation. Drunkenness was his principle release from solitude. He exemplified the thought of William James that "drunkenness expands, unites, and says Yes." His art, as contrasted with that of his sober contemporary, Mr. T. S. Eliot, is the art of a drunken spirit: the physical words totter and capitulate before strange places, whereas their images

and intuitions rise up from that expanded other realm of drunkenness.

The intoxicated uniqueness of Crane, and his estrangement from any recognizable system of thought or belief, cause him to resemble the performer set off from the public which considers him without very much understanding or sympathy. The clown, the juggler, and the poet are all fused in Hart Crane. Like the twelfth century juggler of Our Lady, Crane sought a public worthy of consecrating his life and his work. The juggler's dance and Crane's verses are the same testimonial to what was best, humanly speaking, in both men.

Crane begins his poem *The Visible the Untrue* with the words:

Yes, I being
the terrible puppet of my dreams, shall
lavish this on you—.

After *Southern Cross*, with its religious overtones and its invocation of Mary, this poem is the other personal statement of the poet who now sees himself as the puppet or clown. The expanse of ocean in *Southern Cross* pointed toward a possible paradise and a possible knowledge of Mary's grace. But *The Visible the Untrue* is a poem of purely human kindness and unkindness. The clown has had to learn how to banish hope and exist solely in his performance.

I'm wearing badges
that cancel all your kindness.

Whereas the mediaeval juggler's art was performed in a knowledge of faith, hope, and love, the modern poet's art is composed in the knowledge only of love.

There is a further example of the poet's identification of himself with the buffoon in the poem *Chaplinesque*, written by Crane in 1921 after he had attended a performance of Charlie Chaplin's current film of that year, *The Kid*. Crane and Chaplin are united in being the timid modern hero, the "chétif," who has to content himself with "random consolations." But in their timidity and severed lives they know a love for the world which is peculiarly theirs. Crane's love for the city and his stimulation

derived from the crowds in the city are equal in their intensity to Chaplin's deep understanding of the common man and his power of tragi-comedy over the vast masses of people who attend the cinema. Crane's love of humanity is reminiscent of Walt Whitman's, and the touching symbol he uses in *Chaplinesque* of the kitten which he has heard in the wilderness evokes a strong connotation of the Gospel story of John the Baptist. The man who loved the sea is the same as the poet-puppet and Our Lady's acrobat in their identical quest for love, immortality, and paradise.

The same process of identification becomes more complex, more deeply religious, and more cosmological in Crane's poem, *Lachrymae Christi*. Here, in the final lines, three figures seem to be invoked and equalized: Dionysus, Christ, and the modern artist. The image is that of the cross, and the crucified smile of all three faces is apostrophized by Crane as the "target smile." Three ages and three tragedies are merged into one. Dionysus, the Nazarene, and the buffoon are the same target for the same world's cruelty. The earth around them, like a grail, seems to exist for the principle of their sacrifice.

II

The "irreconcilable" which the artist meets on various socio-logical and psychological levels is always at the core of his major experience, and explicitly so in Crane, and also in Rimbaud with whose poetry Crane felt strong affiliation although he was unable to read it easily in the original. Their experience and temperament were so similar that there was little need for Crane of literal translation of Rimbaud's texts. Both Rimbaud and Crane were unable to recognize or feel themselves a part of the bourgeois plitudinous world into which they were born. They both sought a world that could be recognized, that existed somewhere, that was "dimensional." But they knew that the world would become dimensional and explicable only when love existed in harmony with the universe. The love of the artist for his work seems

to exist in the modern world when he has a sense of the irreconcilable in the other domains of love: the love of man for woman, or the love of man for God. Hence, the artist completes on one level a reconciliation between himself and the world which was impossible for him on another level.

Between life and art there will always extend an abyss of physical and phycic anguish. "I meet you therefore in that eventual flame," says Faustus to Helen in Crane's poem, and thereby states the meeting between the poet and beauty, a meeting wholly improbable without the flame of experience. And it is precisely within that flame of experience where glows the paradox of the irreconcilable. "L'air de l'enfer ne souffre pas les hymnes," said Rimbaud. Experience is the punishment for Crane and Rimbaud, and in that room of fire there is no peace and no possible canticle celebration of love.

The first part of this drama of the irreconcilable is the specific rôle of man which his nature imposes upon the artist. Rimbaud and Crane were riveted to homosexuality in much the same way that a convict is riveted to his chain. They could look at the river and the sea and discover there a kind of poetic freedom, but only after the contemplation of their own hearts had drugged them with bitterness and frustration. There is a striking parallel in the desire of both poets to live with primitive peoples, in Rimbaud's return to the Negroes of Africa, in Crane's visits to sailors' dives and Mexico. The need to cohabit with those of a primitive nature or at least of a different nature from one's own unquestionably has a strong sexual motivation. To become god of the savages for Rimbaud would equate the attainment to sexual freedom and satisfaction. If one can't copulate with a woman of one's own society, one can with a woman of another race, of another skin and creed. Rimbaud and Crane never emerged from the drama of puberty when there is so strong a temptation to love in contradiction to the laws of nature. The sexual experience of puberty is harassing and insoluble because it is an effort to know one's own sex without going beyond it. This is the dilemma of the homosexual who, of the sex act, knows only its aspect of death and never

its meaning of birth. Copulation, or even the desire for copulation, without the death and the birth together is the darkest and most insoluble experience of man. On the one hand, Arthur Rimbaud, in the prophetic trances of his late adolescence saw himself as a god among the primitive Negroes, and was in reality the slave to his own nature and an outcast from the bourgeois society of Charleville and Paris. And on the other hand, Hart Crane, in the poems he wrote between the ages of twenty and thirty, saw himself as the artist in the midst of the normal bourgeois of Chicago and New York, and was in reality the clown among the sailors and the tough boys of the waterfront bars. But both, in their art, —and herein lie the signal greatness and transcendency of the homosexual—attain a purity, a Platonic purity, unknown to the ordinary artist. The change which transforms a man into an artist takes on for the homosexual a fervor and religious profundity akin to the transformation of a man into a priest, because in the change are all hope and justification for himself as a man. Crane calls it, in his most beautiful poem (*Voyages III*),

The silken skilled transmemberment of song

and we recognize the same purifying principle by which, in art, experience is not hidden but intensified and passes beyond morality, as in the sonnets of Shakespeare and in the paintings of Michelangelo.

The drama of the irreconcilables in the heart of man is never separated from the drama of the irreconcilables in the universe of man. In the poetry of Rimbaud and Crane the image of a body of water, whether it be the sea or the river, is the persistent symbol of the universe. It is the cruellest of symbols, the mightiest, and the most inhuman, the element of nature man is the least able to embrace or comprehend. The imaginative experience of Rimbaud is his flight down the river into the fullness of the ocean, the bitterness he feels there in the total expanse and depth of color, and his subsequent return, not to the river but to the caricature of water fertility in the muddy pool of the city street. The combined spiritual and geographical flight he describes in

both *Bateau Ivre* and *Une Saison en Enfer* is a restatement of the romantic heresy of attempted life in unreality, and also a denial of the experience's validity. The actual life story of Rimbaud in his escape from the ancient parapets of Europe to the exotic countries of Africa and Asia and his ultimate return to the hospital in Marseilles precisely parallels the voyage in his literary testament. And likewise, the imaginative experience of Hart Crane, as related in *Atlantis*, the culminating section of *The Bridge*, where the sea subsumes all voices and all times, where we read the sea's drama which is formed by the extinguishing of other elements, parallels the literal experience of his suicide. Whereas Rimbaud makes a rapid exploration of the sea's myth and returns from it to the bare reality of land, Crane never exhausts its cruelty and finally espouses it when he hurls himself in death into its very center. The myth of Europe tortures Rimbaud and he tries to get beyond it into pre-Christian primal times. But this myth exists and Rimbaud's tragedy is pure and classic, whereas the myth of America which Crane tries to comprehend is not yet fully created, and his tragedy is caricatured and truncated. Europe was too old for Rimbaud, and America was too young for Crane, as the homosexual is always too old as a boy and too young as a man.

Behind Rimbaud and Crane, and fully known to both of them because he possesses their temperament and prefigures their art, stands Charles Baudelaire. He is their ancestor but endowed with a knowledge of woman, possessing a love and hate of woman, and possessing also a knowledge of good and evil. In the commingling of the love and tenderness Baudelaire felt for his mother, he learned about the heart of woman, about love and despair, about love and hate, about good and evil; but Rimbaud, as is very often the case with a certain kind of homosexual, hated his mother even as a young boy. Not only is woman absent from the work of Rimbaud, but a real misogyny or hate of woman resounds through many of his poems. If Baudelaire knew the difference between good and evil, Rimbaud doubted this difference and was tormented with not knowing it. Crane was less tormented than Rim-

baud, but he felt and acknowledged a lack of terror which helped to create many of the greatest pages in *Une Saison en Enfer*.

The rôle of woman in a poet's work is closely associated with his feeling about the problem of good and evil. The poet's rite is his transformation of the universe into his own poetic universe. He counterfeits the essential gesture of the priest, and poetry, which is the changed substance, remains inviolate. The muse of poets is perhaps simultaneously Eve and Our Lady. Neither a saint nor profane, the muse resembles all women and is no one of them. With Hopkins and Péguy she is the Virgin, with Baudelaire she is the infinity of carnal desire, with Rimbaud and Crane she is mystery—neither sacred nor profane—more explicitly than ever the muse, for this name was invented to disguise mystery and hide the imperishable impulse of man toward woman.

Rimbaud and Crane are two of those essentially tragic artists who, rather than forming a part of the large cycle of their period, form complete cycles in themselves. Rimbaud went through the three phases of revolutionary, visionary, and messiah, which easily equate the phase of human love (when the boy hated his mother and loved the workmen as they returned home in the evening: cf. *Poètes de sept ans*), the phase of philosophical love (when the boy became poet in the mysterious alchemy of words: cf. *Sonnet des voyelles*), and finally the phase of divine love (when the poet sought more than the creation of poetry in his ultimate prophetic writings: cf. *Une Saison en Enfer*). These phases are summarized and reversed in a sentence of *Adieu*, the final section of the *Saison*:

“J'ai créé toutes les fêtes, tous les triomphes, tous les drames.

The cycle of Crane is described in *Three Songs of The Bridge*. In the first, the poet, incapable of loving woman, seeks the love of God; in the second, he states the pure void of lust; in the third, he transcends lust in his desire for purity and Platonic love. Hence, in Crane, these three phases of religious tragedy, sexual experience, and song reproduce in their own way the major cycle of divine, human, and philosophic love. But in all the stages of

Rimbaud and Crane, in Rimbaud's revolutionary-visionary-messianic cycle, and in Crane's religious-sexual-canticle cycle, the poet remains the puppet tormented by the absence of love he feels within him and by his straw-stuffed body which, on every level of experience, can only depict the burlesque of his desire.

III

The mighty symbol of water surrounds and submerges especially those heroes who know that love is condemned and who seek an unknown holiness: Icarus, Prometheus, Rimbaud, Crane. Their sea is comparable to the chapel for Our Lady's juggler, and his swaying body resembles the ceaseless motion of the waves. The juggler has discovered in the statue the necessary immobility which provides a reason for his curious antics and his restlessness. The necessary bridge immobilized across the water is the religious statue for Crane. But Rimbaud's boat is never moored and at the end of its drunkenness its keel collapses and it sinks into the depths. But Rimbaud knew of the fixed lighthouses of Baudelaire and the imprisoned albatross and the limitless hope of innocence. The Virgin is innocence and steadfastness for the juggler, as the bridge and "the seal's wide spindrift gaze toward Paradise" are the same symbol for Crane.

Le Jongleur de Notre Dame is a composed and contrived story to illustrate the spiritualization and sanctification of a grotesque act. The poetry of Hart Crane has no similar theme or coherence. Man's double adventure with evil and grace is not narrated in both juggler and poet, but each, separately, exemplifies one half of the dual adventure. The juggler, unsuspecting during the final dance before the Virgin's statue, was already the man so solicited by grace that his movements and capers were propelling him into another world. Hart Crane, with an intimate knowledge of his disintegration during the final months of his life in Mexico, was already the man so solicited by evil that his plunge into the ocean from the boat on its way back to New York

was not only a tragic culmination to his life but a purifying one as well. The clown's final dance joined him to eternity because of its spiritual intention. Crane's suicide joined him to the major symbol of his poetry—the sea—in which he had sought as an artist a release and a sanctification, in which he ultimately found as a man an end of suffering and an escape from himself.

The final moments for both the juggler and Hart Crane were therefore moments of participation and identification: the clown participated in a dance made sacred by its identification with worship; Crane participated in the ocean depths and thereby identified himself with the purest, the most expansive, and the most paradisaic principle of his art.

About The Contributors



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Triptych

By Richard Eberhart



Percy: Whimsicality is a thing in itself.
Cast out your noble argument.
You've only got to go look
At a child fetched forth from the womb,
Or see an old codger croak,
To assume the world is nothing but sorrow.

John: But, you forget, sir,
The importance of values,
Of rigorous discernment among them.

Percy: Ha, your cheeks will be long
Enough to make sizable culverts
In them, down which to flush
The tearful sorrows of your seriousness.
Come, praise whimsicality.
He's a painted clown can walk a
Tight rope narrowly, and will fool the people.
He's your only modern who can't be criticized.
He's understudy to the true bigwigs,
Those who experience experience.
Mark his moony jaws and craven
Pate, his withal constancy.
Critics be brought to the tent.
They have not learnt all.
They want juice.

John: My dear sir,
You run on like an adolescent litterateur.
Come out of it.
Let us get down to reality—

Percy: Ho, reality is up. What's up? So
We are up to reality. I
Insist on levity. There's a
Certain deviltry in all levity.
Let your philosophical discourse
Wait on the slow decay of paper.
The shelves will last and the books on them,
Till the digger worms set up a Piccadilly
And haul stuffs hard through the tubes
That the forage of nature's
Dumped atop the sheaves of art.
Spirit won't keep.
But like the laughter in the throat
It shocks out over the teeth
In a stony springing brook;
Falls over an edge and
Becomes an airy gauze;
Becomes great laughing-crystals.
The worms have no guts,
And must eat only wood and paper.
I am an Air-eater,
The hardest, rarest occupation.

John: It is time I praised my own tolerance,
But I have known you so long
I will allow you the pleasures of expansion.
However, I have for the past fortnight
Examined the five volumes of the late Dr. Fardel,
The latinist we knew at the University—

Percy: If you
Would put all the great brains of
Oxford and Cambridge in a tub
And boil them for three and thirty minutes,
You might beget an elf.

John: As I was saying, the learned Doctor—

Percy: Oh—I feel a pun coming.

Hmmm. A gross pun, although

All men hate them, is worth more than
A quire of your syllogistic Doctors.
Is an integer of sense, a compound
Of fertility; albeit an indigestible squib.

John: Spare me your puns anyway.

Now, his theory in general is—

Percy: I wonder if he theorized in his lady's bed.
No doubt, being a Latin scholar,
He went over old conjugations.

John: This so-called merriment of yours
Is merely dull superstructure
You erect upon your ignorance.

Percy: If I'm ignorant, then I love ignorance.
I'll squeeze it into a voluptuous guffaw then.
And I'll shout ignorance at you
Until you get some sense.

John: Such a belligerent attitude is hardly
Becoming to one of your formal education.
But in our last discussion, I recall
We had seriously got to the point of—

Percy: The point of merriment at you, sir!
When a man is out of work,
And loitering in his father's plush arm-chair,
It's grand to stalk the realistic pessimists.

But I am for the point of ignition:
Let the intellectual hayricks
In the wet season be burnt up by
The sun's hilarious eye.

Asthma has got a grip on existence.
That is my particular gripe. A jape.
In truth, I am so full of glee I am
More ridiculous than before I said so.
Come, now, have you ever seen
A critic jump a fence?
'Twould be damned bad for his criticism.
I'll bet the barbed wire would

Criticise his backside, make him
Bleed out his petty principles;
He should have jumped higher, and got over the
Greeks.

John: Well, I guess I must leave you
And go back to my discourses.
You seem incapable of
Even an attempt at lucidity.

Percy: What, lucidity?
When Lucy is lucid to me
I will tempt her and attempt her
And run and tell thee.
Pardon, I retch. It must be the acidity.

John: You make me sick.

Percy: Be merry. As long as you are not married,
You might as well be merry.
Really, tomorrow I will cry all day.
I will buy little squirt guns filled
With sugar water and run them down
The two lobes of my face,
To let you know I am crying.
Tomorrow I will be the soul of solemnity.
I will go to the Museum and lie down
Full length in a Medieval stone coffin.
I did it once, and was so grievous a sight,
The attendant broke out laughing.
Let me groan from six o'clock in the morning.
By noon I will have got the habit,
And by night I shall be an absolute wailing ghost.

John: Come, you are not reasonable.

Percy: Reason and treason are the same thing to me.
Reason is too credulous.
It irks me like old ladies;
Or old gubernatorial gentlemen.
Ha! I fly by Absolute Force.
I am so light the air is my very being

And I would be all over the sky.

Your reasoners only poke about in old clothes.

John: You simply rave against what you love.

Percy: If I rave against what I love,

You fail me in reciprocal

Love of what you hate.

Oh, there comes a she.

Now I must fly against

The earthly quality of women.

Hello, vegetable, how's your green hue?

Priscilla: What sport is this?

John: Good afternoon, dear. My greetings. Don't bother

About him; he's in a ripe in consequence,

And won't bother us a bit. What a lovely frock—

Priscilla: I have have just come from town with a car

Full of sheer things, the smartest things from Paris.

And these matching jewels from India.

Percy: Oh, for a new attitude toward death.

The Polynesians did well when they

Packed and squeezed the head down to

The round and look of a sick lemon

Left overlong in the sun. Fond embalmers.

The bulging fellow got down at last,

Brains confessed in a boy's handful.

Priscilla: What an awful fool. How should I

Provoke such language, and with my new ensemble?

John: As host, I must ameliorate

Between your displeasure and his candor.

Percy: I propose tombstones and mausoleums

Be laid under the pile-driver

And done into powder for the cheeks of virgins.

Such quantities of the stuff would be,

And so few authoritative patronizers,

They'd be chalked to the death withal,

Tricked out with the most emaciated spells

To get their man. Now, these dead.

What to do with the dead. I once saw a
Groundhog stick his fat corpse
Into the very light of July.
It blistered, broke loose, and you've never seen
So merry a sight. Soon he was awim
In his own oils, hot as a lecher,
And then he was dancing with maggots.
In a fortnight he was itching with
A most greedy dissipation,
As hilarious as a bunch of bees,
And strong enough to drive off a troop of buzzards.
By August middle he had got strained
Into a nervous maniacal gymnastic,
And by December his divine frenzy
Was quits with the world.
I passed by the place the next summer,
It had a lonely look.
Indeed, he had only a little hairy ghost.
But it would boil again; and manure the wild flowers.
Now take corpses, stretch them out
In bold capable nakedness
On the ground and see them do likewise.
And liveliness to them.
What a purgative performance.
'Twould make people Buddhistic,
And do away with the wars.
You'd have a better opinion of life
For the stench. Nothing like strong youth,
Strong love, strong corpses boiling,
Quick with effervescence.
And hang on their heaving breasts
The jewels of women. They'll sink
Down slowly in the fleshly mess,
And at the last shine on and dazzle the earth.
An acute eye will pluck the glory
Of their indestructibility.

Page Hieronymus Bosch.

John: You betray yourself, fellow,
And in the name of frivolity
Entertain us with a quite serious notion.
I glimpse even a spiritual
Regenerative principle
In your suggested and unlikely tactic.
But you employ a symbol for your
Metaphysics; otherwise they would vanish.
They would go back to the blood
And become the simple energy of action.
There is no necessity to change
The various burial rites of the world;
They are forms of human decency.
You would do better to apply your fancy
To the living,
Who stand in need of vitalizing notions.

Percy: Have at you. I am Air-engine.
And incandescence is the sole sweet of the world.

John: You are in danger of becoming a theologian.
If you would put your views
Into a somewhat less heretical mould,
Even encase them in a cloak
Foreign to their character,
You might get a Basic fellowship,
And study a year at Rio.
But you are only man after all,
The actor-animal.

Priscilla: Well, apparently I am here
Only as an objective symbol of
Your opinion of women:
I must suffer your talk.
You are always dissatisfied;
Fomenting ideas
As if the world could be changed.

Percy: There's no more happiness in the world

Than a squirrel has with a nut.
You crack it open, eat it up,
And want more. But ideas
Are everywhere in the sky.
Come, fly by whimsicality.

John: You ought to work for the City Company.
You could wear spikes,
Climb up poles like your ancestors,
And thereby carry electricity to the people.
If you were less ubiquitous and more single
I would want to cope with you.
Come, let me put some salt on your tail.
Your shallowness—

Percy: Shallow? Then air is shallow,
Through which we see to heaven.
Shallow? Then water is shallow,
Of which we are all composed.
Shallow? Then morning's atmosphere,
Lakes, rivers, rills and streams
Are shallow. What is your jealous depth
But layers and layers of shallows? What
Profundity, but a schoolmaster's
Multiplications of a feather falling.
Shallow? Then I'll lie down on the wee
Boat of a feather, and sail in the heavenly air.
I count on the docility
Of men to save them much trouble.
Here is an old one, a seller of papers,
Bearing his load of defunct news
Homeward in the center of night.
Life makes him
Faithful to his duty. He says
Good-night gently, when you pass.
And I daresay he is as good as
Your schizophrenic synthetic dictators.
Shallow? Come praise whimsicality.

Priscilla: I say, do you mind, I must be leaving—

John: Why, I'm awfully sorry, won't you—

Priscilla: Good-bye—

John: You've driven the lovely creature off
With your frail bombast.

Percy: I must go. This is not what I was.
This is something else. This is pure Phoenix.
Come feel it. No, you can't. For though
You were the vampire and drank my blood,
You would not get me. Fetch me
The past in a basket lined with grass,
If you think to. Bring me
A bucket full of huckleberries
Plucked at ten years old, if you will.
Present me my first virgin,
If you can. Or dig up my bones
When I shall have been a decade dead,
If you are able. No, no,
I am something else than I am.
I am the tickings of clocks whose ratchets
Wear away now in the mill stream.
And the rust on them, standing in old barns.
I am the bud of the leaf
Whose remains stick on my heels . . .
Oh, I am the lad's eyes,
When there was wonder upon them
Like flax twinkling in the wind and sun . . .
The same skull; Plato and Aristotle,
Plus Shakespeare, and Donne, and Blake, and Marx,
And as gone as old Neanderthal.
John: Would you mind coming along?
Percy: Oh, that's all right, but the world's
Nothing but a pile of filth. The
Relations between men are as excellent as hell,
They are all well ordered and arranged beforehand.
There's nothing as full of end-results

As friendship; and nothing so crafty
As men in love with mountains.
When you have gone through all,
Evil stares you in the strict, emaciated face.
But you're not emancipated yet.
You can no more conquer yourself
Than walk on Pluto. The good falls
Into a big disrespect and a dusty bin;
Evil flowers out incandescent,
Ready to burn you up again.

The masters of life have as much
Energy as it; the rest fade off.

John: I say, do you mind coming along?

Percy: There are those who say flowers
Have no more to say; look there,
There is the world pure and final,
Nothing else to it. There are those
Who say those are partial fellows,
Befriended by lenses. These are troubled
By a fire in the guts and say
Microscopes do no good.
The messy little bluet is only
A sallying forth of some knotted ganglia.
They have a great room between the ears,
Wherein they play games. There are others,
Who can hardly tell whether they are
In Venice or Canton, but they are
Sure neither has the importance of a thumb tack.
They doubt they doubt their own doubts,
And end where they began—a right
Doleful dingle-dangle state indeed.

The experimenters are, sooth-la,
The only realizers. That is
Because they refuse to think.
They put chemicals in test tubes,
Measure the results, and have no

Astonishment whatever at the conflagration.
But the artist saves the world.
I have been everywhere, done everything.
There is nothing left but
To search out the bosom of God,
The chief receding pleasure known to man.
The searching is ever better
Than the finding; when you have found something
You must keep it, which is another kind of searching.
If you search for an unknown woman,
You must always be seeking. If you
Marry one, you must, though you have her by you,
Seek out new ways continually to appease her.
Get a child, and you go back to God.

- John:* Well, come along now, Percy.
Percy: I have come to no conclusion.
John: You have come to no conclusion.
Percy-John: We have come to no conclusion.
Percy: Conclusion is too inclusive,
Abuses by delusion;
It is a clue, a sieve.
To(o) crude warfare my food is air.

Carapace

By Babette Deutsch



Nor tropic suns can smoke
Nor arctic blizzards freeze
The heart that once had broke
At such fine savageries.
Now it is guarded well,

Ribbed with a leathern truss.
Not the mad tiger's fell,
But calm rhinoceros'
Obdurate hide affords
Defense against all hurt.
Nothing can shake the cords
Under that armored shirt.
Hang it upon barbed wire
Through which the children stare:
This muscle will not tire,
It will not even tear.
Or send it out to swim
With sailors who go down
At a flaming comber's whim:
This heart will never drown.
Where cities shrivel in
Hot ashes it has learned
How an asbestos skin
Is blackened but not burned.
No wound will make it sore,
So strongly is it knit.
Now grief and rage no more
Can pierce or sicken it.
Beyond the chill of fear,
It beats behind a wall
Too thick for agony
To rock with any call:
It has no eye, no ear.
Then who would hear
If once this heart should cry?

The Adventure of Sara Drabble and The Green Bird

By Margaret Currier Boylen



IT WAS summer. There was a smell of slowly cooling vegetation, of a million leaves that had reached the final extension of veins and cells, of stems settling back into the sun-pale mud. The grasses, singular and frail in the springtime, had flourished into complex structures, earthworm-tunnelled and spider-webbed. There was the feeling of spread and sag that comes of nature's encounter with the fullness of time.

The forest, having lost its lyric green and grace, pointed heavily to its final state; the broad gestures of the trees were those of a third-rate landscape. Dark blues lay in slabs along the outer edges of branches and trunks. The thick and obvious boughs presented themselves with the easy distortions, the invisible pumpings of dancers. And the foliage floated above the blue-lined trunks, all the minute and stupefying dance and fugue of leaves, flowers, fruit, nests, squirrels, worms, birds, lice, buds and cones sustained and buoyed by the dear familiar and nameless old web.

The trees had got all the sap and cells they would have this year. And among the lower branches of an elm tree near the bird sanctuary a cluster of blood-colored leaves had formed like a slow outrageous wink.

A speckled peacock crawled up the slate roof of the elephant house, trailing its dark glitter of eyes, serpent-headed, soft-taloned, in a stiff Persephone-pose. The lions shunted back and forth, detached and obsessed, along the brinks of concrete islands, their faces pressed against space as if against a window-pane. The

ostriches, from their operatic plumage to their hooves, were intent, sheep-like, on cropping the grass. Their wings hung away from their bodies like doors ajar that their leathern armpits might have the benefit of the breeze. The kangaroos, for all their round shoulders and domestic hips, pressed python tails to the earth and took the length of their runs in giant aerial leaps. In the bird sanctuary, under the shade of a beech, sat a white duck with primrose eyes, a mammoth gray hare cloud-eyed, and an ordinary cock with eyes coral-rimmed, all three unblinking. Far across the zoo, in an amphitheatre, the dreamlike bear from Tibet stood silently on his head while the crowd yelled. And the camels and giraffes, to celebrate whose peaceful eccentricity circuses were invented, looked outward, their faces, too, pressed against the pane.

In the bird house, where the macaws and cockatoos flew and crawled, a green bird hopped from branch to branch making small clicking sounds. With head to one side it regarded the staring folk from sly and gentle eyes.

Into this idyll casually, murderously strolled Mrs. Sara Drabble, villainess and arch-enemy, annihilating peace, scaring the animals out of their wits. Her picked-fowl body thrust itself between the elephants and their whale-like dreams. In her presence the cobra writhed up and down his gray fake tree as if he were on fire. The apparition of her eyes, informed with hysteria, caused the crocodile to lash the water with long-sheathed entrails, the peacock, distraught Persephone, to scream and scuttle off the roof of the elephant house. The lions threw themselves back and forth on their islands, straining like long-maned kites in a wind, while the nostrils of the giraffes went ashen and bubbly. The ostriches gallumphed madly about their pens, eyes round and stricken, mouths drooping; and the baby aoudad trembled and forgot how to leap straight into the air.

Behind Sara Drabble, her uncouth young belly protruding between sharp hips and her long hands dangling in front of her slack and fastidious as the claws of a chicken before it takes its next step, came Birdie Cotter, in whose garden-fresh fancy the animals had so extravagantly performed.

Birdie Cotter's bony hulk tacked and veered like an unmasted ship and her sharp little head sat atop it like a land-bird blown out to sea. She smelled faintly of droppings, or of rotting bulbs because she was young and unsocial and forgot to bathe. Her ugliness, however, bore the left-handed blessing of being a natural phenomenon. She had descended like a bomb, ruinous and complete, from childhood to womanhood.

Birdie was like the unnatural hot days at the end of winter that sometimes laid waste her native Iowa, when the blossoming of the tulip borders and the violet beds became, instead of the clearly-marked passage into springtime, a brutal concussion of growth and decay. The sun was destructive, the sky behind it a windless horror. The daffodils and hyacinths turned brown and withered before their buds had opened. The sunflower, the peony and the snakeweed shot up from the hot earth before the lilac and the narcissus could indicate Easter.

Time, gentle, mysterious and familiar, had been deleted from the score. The delicate and beguiling overture of the strings and woodwinds—the announcement of tender shoots carpeting the stubblefields where but late the gold-and-black pheasants had mixed a Chinese design with the pilgrim scene; the bluebird's whistle come against the crows, whose flappings in the frozen sunsets had brought to mind the rails and corncrakes of a Chekovian steppe—all of the certain progressions, the unfoldings, the subtle statements of themes had been misplaced.

It was in such weather and in the soul of Birdie as if two friends walking side by side in conversation had accidentally touched one another, turned, and looked straight on the face of lust. Whereupon there had sprung up a wall, binding and estranging them, a wall constructed of fire, blood, the smell of the sea, the stamens of lilies, the muffled cries of museum birds. It was a wall crusted with all that is incremental and legendary, outrageous to the young, and safe only in the hands of those who have survived spring. And tugged back and forth over the wall, the dear familiar old web, the lumpy call to death and resurrection, the thick full spiraling of the French horns, straining,

bellowing their banal tale of the dripping spear, the maimed king, and the love death!

As Birdie peered here and there at the cropping beasts, delighted and oppressed, dependent on the woman who walked beside her, she implored the animals to forgive her for allowing the woman to enter the zoo. Her eyes blinked and her long fingers moved to help form the thoughts that came to her. She had a gesture for thinking, a poking of bent forefingers at nothing, a cupping and cradling of her palms. Seeing the white duck, the hare, and the ordinary cock whose eyes were half-blind from the invasion, she made a stiff sculpting movement with her hands and glanced, meek and scared, at the woman beside her.

“Look what she has done to the animals,” Birdie whimpered to herself, smiling the depraved smile that would pacify her teacher.

The dry gullies, the root-locked pastures spattered generously with cowflops, the grossly comfortable creakings of hens in the barnyard could, Birdie had discovered, be turned to good account. Thus, giving herself a production mounted on the farm, converting her native speech and habit into eccentricity, she could enter, with all possible crudity and lack of good manners into the minds of her associates and return with a good idea as to what would be required of her in order to survive. She had been astonished, sickened, and relieved to learn that very little was actually demanded. The scholastic hierarchy, though they laughed at sight of her, were panting and eager for the least sign of magic. They looked for it in her quarter, knowing that from this crude abominable girl might come the boon; from this Stupid Hans might spring the prince; from the ragged lout, Parsifal.

Recognition of this need and of her hideous mission of fulfilling it had been the fatal predicament of Birdie’s life. The sly sisterly smile she gave to Mrs. Drabble was the smallest of her betrayals. She ingratiated herself to the hierarchy in a thousand and one ways. But in the thousand and second way Birdie recognized herself and behaved. When she came to the zoo, whether in the company of the young intellectuals or alone, it was Birdie

Cotter who could not laugh at the frenetic orang-outang; who refused to possess the mythic Asian panda, the animal who seemed to her the fittest for a godlike and benignant idol. And it was Birdie who saw in the giraffe and the zebra two versions of violence, neither of which was valid for her, the one gibbering in a fire, the other safe at the bottom of a well.

"Gracious God help me," thought the girl, smiling nervously at the ostriches as she flopped along. "She whistles through the canals of my ears, fills my throat with phlegm. She pinches my nostrils with sulphur, rot smell, sick-room, the authentic devil smell. She crawls along my blood like a fever tick; she pads up and down the streets of my body, perpetual sight-seer. She breathes into my open eyes. It's like adolescent love, when you might be a lesbian and he a fairy."

Having thought thus lucidly for her age, Birdie became very tired and longed to sit down somewhere. She glanced around among the bushes and the animals in their frail pens, smiled at Mrs. Drabble, and said lightly: "Shall we be seated?"

The animals at the zoo began to perform their curious antics again. The ostrich tore, the aoudad trembled, the peacock screamed, and Birdie Cotter, in a swift wave of sickness, hastily turned her mind to its favorite pastime, of thinking, sombrely, lovingly, and with pictorial horror of the aspects of Mrs. Drabble.

Mrs. Drabble plucked at Birdie's sleeve. "Birdie!" she whispered, her jaw motionless, only her lips moving, her hands jabbing secretly in the direction of a loud group of boys and girls around the glass cage of an ape. "Look," she muttered as if casually, her eyes shining, "Look at the young Jews over there."

Birdie did not hear, and went on thinking, cupping her hands as if each thought could be sculpted in air.

"Your fertility," she thought, "is the fertility of a log bearing the delicious mushroom, bloodless flesh. You're like the Indian pipe that is colorless, tubular, one single line throughout, the ghostly flower, isolated like a deadly bacillus, apart from all the plant life of the forest. Excitement is monstrous in you, like perpetual orgasm. The prim palpitant caverns you never filled with

love now eagerly absorb the filling hate. You found no island in yourself to fortify; discovered no peoples and no times in your speech. And now, from the lack of the world's life in you springs the quick salvation war, the claim to identity with a life in which you are no part.

"Nature," thought Birdie harshly, "will not accept the outrageous claim."

Mrs. Drabble, unused to being ignored, gave Birdie a vicious dig in the ribs. "Look at them!" she chuckled, "Look at the young Jews over there!"

Birdie looked up, startled, first one way and then the other. Finally she heard what her teacher was saying.

The wall moved into place about her. The delicately constructed wall of blood and chalices, the windings of the French horns rose up in her, suffocating, horrid and alive. She felt her heart clang beneath her breast bone, her blood turn into steam and vapor, hot, lighter than air, so that she had to clench her fists, fling out her legs and arms lightly in order to keep from dissolving. She felt the shocking evil surge of excitement, horrible and vibrant, that was a familiar thing to her, and she began to feel something new and terrifying.

She had always been able to sustain herself by the violent tableaus in her mind. But today, seeing the oblique look, the intimate smile that saturated the face of the woman, Birdie felt her mind leaping quietly away into a void from which she could not recall it.

Where were her visions of the black field and the evil flower? Where the picturesque opinions, the stimulating compositions that had been her mainstay all these months? They were gone. She was alone. She felt like joining the animals in their frenzy, so helpless was she at the sudden turn of affairs.

And just then, who should come by but Barksdale Numbles and Colly Brown, who had up till now not been impressed by the park and the weather, coming as they did from the South, where summer is given an epic and exhausting production. The

two boys, giggling and chewing peanuts, stopped in front of the lions, and Sara Drabble and Birdie Cotter heard Barksdale Numbles say to Colly Brown:

“I’m goin’ to get a little rock and chunk it at this ol’ lion, Colly, an’ make him let out a yell so’s you can get the hang of him.”

“Who he lookin’ at, Bark?” Colly said, his voice following the patient level of excitement he felt for all things shown him.

“Nothin’—he lookin’ at nothin’. He mus’ be blind as a bat.”

“Whadda ya know!” breathed Colly pleasantly. “Blind—and an animal to boot!”

They walked a little way, Sara and Birdie almost breaking their necks to keep up with them, but for different reasons. The shadows of the tree branches fell across Colly’s eyes with irresponsible soft blows.

“I’ll show you the monkeys now,” Barksdale Numbles said, chuckling. “There’s a monkey over here you can’t tell his face from his behind—’ceptin’ his behind’s bald!”

“Honest, Bark? That the way he look?”

“Honest to God.”

The blind boy smiled equably, for all of the pictures that hung in his skull were familiar.

Birdie Cotter stopped and looked about her, hands folded over her stomach. With her head to one side, she gazed after the two boys, then all around at the zoo. Her eyes began to gleam. Slowly she scratched her head, nodded, and fetched a long sigh. Then she turned upon Mrs. Drabble, placed her hands on the woman’s shoulders, and shook her gently for one minute.

“Look at the sky!” Birdie said. For over East, head and shoulders above the stone rose-and-glass hotels, clouds were making up. It looked as if the weather weren’t going to hold.

“What are you doing? Who do you think you are?” Mrs. Drabble screeched softly.

Birdie paid no attention. She was closely watching the elephants, how they looked out between long girlish eyelashes and

seemed to swim in the dim light that was gathering. She noted that the trees were stirring; the topmost leaves shook, although no wind could be felt below.

“Hush up, Mrs. Drabble,” Birdie said kindly. She had been reminded of the country, and of a person who has come home after a long time away. She felt like asking a thousand questions, and knew that a returned one would be sentimental, confused, but highly excited.

A neighbor would say, “Old man Hicks put up a new silo and painted it pea-green.”

And the home-comer would snort, “What the hell, that was news when I was a little kid.”

But it’s all right, he’s glad to hear it again; it was a scandal then and is now. And as the wanderer feels a little inclined to strut, so Birdie felt expansive; but the cool beneficent excitement and the humility she felt were too much for her. She could only stare and understand for a while that it was possible to be oneself if only one knew about the grotesque extensions of oneself that are neither friendly nor unfriendly and that require neither murder nor corruption in the determination of their virtue.

Birdie seized the arm of the flabbergasted teacher and jerked her down the path. Mrs. Drabble struggled and screamed carefully.

In the voice of her father calling hogs Birdie bellowed, “To the Bird House! To the Bird House!”

For she had an idea—a thrilling, fairly absurd idea that chimed with her mood. It was hardly so much as an idea, it was a shadowy, refreshing fancy that was growing in her small head. Gradually she began to anticipate, with all her native reason and light-heartedness, a marvelous piece of charlatanry, of theatre. It would be a magician’s trick, phantastic, impermanent—there was no doubt in Birdie’s mind of its efficacy, and she hastened to perform it.

Down the path they ran, the girl tugging, the woman hapless and horrified.

"Mrs. Drabble!" Birdie panted, giving the woman a tug, "Mrs. Drabble, you're going to see the Green Bird!"

"Birdie, stop! What green bird?" the woman hissed, as people turned to stare.

They careened onward, Birdie shouting excitedly, Mrs. Drabble tottering after her, casting slyly about for escape, but not fancying a dash across the plain where a herd of bison were peacefully grazing.

"Some things," Birdie cried in a hearty voice, "Some things I remember nearly every day. There was a young boy named Arnie Johnson back home. Christmas Eve he sang at the church doin's. Everybody was there, and my Grampy led the singing, bellered out 'Joy to the World!' ten times louder and faster than anyone else. He couldn't bear to sing hymns like they were funeral dirges. 'Joy to the World!' he shouted, putting his embarrassment aside, for he was a shy man. His old face was comical, and his thick brown hair the color of a chestnut leaf with frost on it. Know what?"

Again Birdie shook the dazed woman, and her voice grew furious.

"Grampy was the only seedsman in town who didn't cut his men's wages during the depression, and what with the drouth and hybrid corn coming in and no money to build machinery to compete with it he was a ruined man. But at the Christmas Eve he bellered out all the same 'and heav'n and nature sing!'

"There was the Christmas tree, of course, all lighted and its forest scent rising, and in the front rows sat the little children, knowing that tomorrow was Christmas. They shouted or babbled in wandering voices to themselves, or sat still with their mouths open. Then Grampy darted up into the choir to put on the Santa Claus red suit and beard and to pass out the hard candy, and this was not beneath his dignity as an elder of the church.

"And it was at this time that Arnie Johnson sang, in the indescribably sweet and frightful tones of the inspired child soprano, 'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day'."

Birdie stopped and thought awhile, never loosing her grasp on Sara Drabble's aching arm.

"It was the next summer," Birdie began again, "the next summer Arnie Johnson had another one of his fits and died and we all said it was a mercy, there was bad blood in the family somewhere, even if the Johnsons did come of good Minnesota stock. And Arnie would have fits and fall on the hot stove or break his face on the sidewalk and his family got so worn out and sick and tired they didn't bother to keep an eye on him unless he got hurt real bad. Oh, it wasn't that they didn't love him, why, no, they took him to Omaha and Rochester and Chicago and finally had to go on the County on account of him, yes, and Mrs. Johnson, Thelma, she'd pray he would get better and not die and cry all night after bandaging his chin and squeezing his boils just as gentle and tender, saying over and over to the boy, 'There, Arnie, that's a good boy. Mother won't hurt you. Don't you cry, Arnie.' It was just that you could only do so much and no more."

Sara Drabble looked as if she'd heard footsteps on her grave. "I shall be sick, Birdie," she said suddenly. "I shall be sick."

"Not before we see the Green Bird!" the girl caroled, suddenly happy, glancing up at the sky, listening for the quiet running of the wind below the tree tops that would come pretty soon.

At these words Mrs. Drabble became white.

Birdie grinned. She shook her finger at Mrs. Drabble and said waggishly, "Things are going to get a lot worse before they get better, and I've got a devil in me as big as a horse. Two old sayings of my grandmother—who is sitting out in the back porch sun, whither she has fled from the persecutions of her grandchildren.

"Her fierce slightly hunch-backed body sways uneasily, she stretches her lips in agony. Black spaces show behind her strong yellow front teeth. And the terrible thing is this: her sorrow falls apart, disorganized; it neither cleanses nor refreshes her, for she doesn't know how to be grief-stricken. The role of the persecuted is hard and unfamiliar to her, and it has proved to be a comic role. She is seventy, and she has seen the door closed in her face, the key delicately extracted from the lock. She wipes the mist from her spectacles and presses the ball of her thumb around

her purple-ringed old eyes. She raises a large-knuckled, rope-veined claw—the one weighted by a high-set diamond and a gold band a quarter of an inch wide—and takes the key pin of yellow bone from her hair. Down it falls, a tough skein of black and gray wire, over her baby-soft neck to her knees. It is a shameless gesture. From a short distance she looks like a hamadryad half clothed in willow bark. And yet it is only to hide her dry, unfamiliar and obscene grief that she does it.

“And do you know why she is crying, this old woman? Simply because her visions of childhood have been destroyed. Like many old pioneers who have led rough but very respectable lives, she has clung to that respectability as if, by very concentration, it could be transmuted into the loveliness she has never known. She has constructed an idea of youth so far removed from actuality as to be not even sentimental. She who, in Denver, in the panic of '93, had, as a bride, slaughtered pigs for her sick husband to sell, has come to have a religious faith in the childhood of fairy tale and legend.

“The Canterbury bells ring, the crocuses dot the young grass, and the forest animals walk side by side with the children. There is a song her grandchildren have learned in school:

*‘Sandman, sandman, come from drowsy land, man,
Where the skies are red and gold,
Where the poppy-buds unfold,
And fairy tales are told . . .’*

The old woman sees the children walking beneath the red-and-gold skies; the great burning masses move eerily above the green meadow, turning, curving, swelling . . . and the children pick the poppies below, the poppies that slowly unfold in the sunless brilliance—huge black-and-orange oriental ones, small gold-green California ones, fragile pink-stained wild poppies . . . The children turn, smiling, lifting up their laden hands . . .

“But do you know what my brothers and sisters and I had done, to drive Grandmother, weeping, out on the back porch? It is cherry-picking time, a windy, sunlit morning in June, and

we are high up in the three sparkling trees picking the red cherries. And cherry-picking grows dull, so we amuse ourselves by shouting back and forth, so that all the neighbors may hear, fantastic lies about our family. There is no evil, we proclaim, smacking our lips, of which our tribe is not capable. It is scandalous. Windows all over the neighborhood creep open as we remind one another of this crime and that, we nearly fall out of our trees with laughter, and at last Grandmother rushes out, trembling, bewildered, furious, so pathetic that shame sprouts in us and hardens to contempt.

“The flouted old woman who cares for us with fanatical devotion bursts into a cataract of abuse, showering on us foul expressions she has heard in the rough days of the West, genuinely horrifying us.

“Disgusted, nauseated, into the house we go, out comes Grampy’s black belt and she straps us within an inch of our lives—then stumbles out to the back porch where she slowly and with great difficulty passes into the clutches of grief.”

It had started to rain. The sun, still shining in the West, touched the warm drops and strung them in broken lines from the dark sky to the earth. The trees and bushes cast off the heavy banality of line and color and appeared fresh and radiant in the downpour. The animals walked about or stood, ears pricked, sniffing the new air. Inside the Bird House the sunlight floated greenly between the bars of the cages and there the hue and cry, the flash and sparkle were like nothing ever known in a Western wood or sky.

Sara Drabble stood in front of the Green Bird.

In a leafy tree beneath the pointed roof the Green Bird uttered a strange cry and moved from branch to branch in a slow stately dance, pecking, with small clicking sounds, the glittering fruit that hung among the leaves. The bird’s back was turned to Mrs. Drabble; there was only the rhythmic flash of its body among the polished fruit, and the light clicking sound of its beak. Then slowly the head of the Green Bird turned on its neck. The eyes

were upon Mrs. Drabble, bright and inquiring, eyes like the soft terrifying sound of a plucked string in a place where there has been no sound.

Sara Drabble turned in a slow even reel to Birdie Cotter and spoke. Her words came out like the tough cindery roots at the base of blossoming weeds. Her face twitched, but she did not cry.

“Since we’re in the mood for reminiscences,” she said hoarsely, staring with great bitterness straight into the girl’s eyes, “I have one myself.

“There was a girl in our town who had the misfortune to have been dashed off, with rare style and brilliance, by the humorous and malignant hand of nature. She had been given a bent twig for a nose, a tinted egg shell for a face, and two pieces of coal for breasts. Her greenish eyes switched back and forth in her head like the eyes of a thirsty little dog. She had constantly, on one or another of her arms and legs, or all at once, a dreadful skin infection that took the form of enormous crusted blisters. She was unendurable.

“One New Year’s Eve, when all of us young folk had gathered at my home to go sleigh riding beneath the winter stars, this girl, Emily Carscadden, whom we never invited anywhere and whom we had indeed forgotten, came into the parlor where we were toasting marshmallows before the fire.

“She silently undid her bandages, then, with indescribable malevolence and grace, walked amongst us and showed us the patient rotting flesh on her left arm. I smelled the stirring odor of death that she carried about with her under that bandage—and I ordered her out of the house.”

The woman stopped and stared about her in a puzzled angry way. She put her hand to her head, vaguely, felt up beneath her hat, and scratched among her curls. “Since then,” she said, “I’ve never been able to get the smell off me.”

Birdie Cotter, who had aged considerably during the telling of this anecdote, turned and left Mrs. Drabble alone with the Green Bird.

In Time of Fear

By Brewster Ghiselin



The soft cat, clawless, padded with Persian fluff,
A muff-puff lodged in the armchair all day eyeless,
Now, toward dusk, uncovering moons of highlight
Communes with something behind us. Turning, we miss
Her rubber leap, see only eyes flicked off
In the thumped shadow blurring with doubtful fur.
Quick! With the power of solid bright light, block her,
A rabbit bundle, blunt face slapped by the glare:
For if we let her walk without her shadow
Soon she will heave a harder, heavier shoulder,
On moth-soft tufted football panther behind us
A brutal boneweight; or heavying with harsher hair
Creep with tiptoe click of ticking claws;
Or stripe the darkness with a crouched disaster.

BOOK REVIEWS

Person Place and Thing: KARL JAY SHAPIRO. Reynal & Hitchcock.

This is a first book of poems which I think deserves something more than the usual friendly or unfriendly generalizations; it deserves to be taken seriously. It deserves this because it has the one indispensable quality, that apparently inexhaustible enthusiasm for verbal effects which is characteristic of the person for whom the world achieves its full reality only in words. This is not to say that it is altogether a good book; at moments, in fact, it is a very bad one, and at no moment is it a thoroughly satisfactory one. But almost all the badness—the irrelevance, disorder, smartness, bad taste—looks like the result either of overabundant poetic energy or of that stubborn determination to take nobody's word for anything which, if it is impractical in ordinary life, is a happy kind of stupidity for a poet to have. If, that is, I am guessing right, *Person Place and Thing* is Mr. Shapiro's *Comedy of Errors*. This wants demonstrating.

The most obvious cause of confusion in these poems is the fact that Mr. Shapiro's awareness of things has far outrun that personally achieved understanding of them which is the source of any good poem's general structure. The poems here which, in Mr. Ransom's phrase, begin by deliberately committing the poet's awareness to its determination within the elected figure, frequently collapse because the main figure does not readily represent for Mr. Shapiro an inclusive understanding. Thus, *Midnight Show*, for example, overtly commits itself to a statement about a year of war in terms of a movie:

The year is done, the last act of vaudeville, . . .
Enclosed in darkness. Pat. Blackout. . . .
While blue lowlight suffuses mysteries of sleep
Through racks of heads, and smoothly parts the gauzy veil
That slips, the last pretence of peace, into the wings.

But almost immediately Mr. Shapiro becomes fascinated by the movies on the war, rather than the movie as the war. For instance, having reminded himself of the sound track of the newsreel, he gets entangled:

And the Voice, the loving and faithful pointer, trots beside
Reel after reel, taking death in its well-trained stride.
The Voice, the polite, the auctioneer, places his hints
Like easy bids. The lab assistant, the Voice, dips
Their pity like litmus paper into His rancid heart.

Now if this is a metaphorical statement of a society's experience of war as well as a statement about the movies—and, though a case could be made for the former, I do not believe it is actually intended—it still remains true that Mr. Shapiro has got so involved in all he thinks and feels about that ineffable Voice that he has lost track of the main intention. The general structure of the poem has been sacrificed to a merely local interest.

The most frequent cause of trouble is also illustrated by this passage. As Shakespeare's verbal energy asserts itself in *The Comedy of Errors* as mainly irrelevant and seemingly endless word-play of all kinds, so Mr. Shapiro's energy asserts itself in a lively and largely non-functional play of figures. There is a kind of pleasure in seeing him keep up the hunting-dog figure by punning on the cliché by which the Voice is said to take death in its stride. But the figure is more astonishing than effective, for it would not be easy to say what the *stride* of a pointer, whose most evident connection with death is his stillness while he holds a point, has to do with death; nor are there many feelings about pointers which fit what Mr. Shapiro obviously wishes us to feel about the Voice—unless Mr. Shapiro is an ardent SPCA man, which I very much doubt. Much the same kind of comment may be made about the two comparisons which follow. The Voice and the auctioneer both want to "sell" us something, but it is not the auctioneer who places bids nor do most people find auctioneers especially machiavellian figures. Only change links the litmus papers and pity; but what Mr. Shapiro is really concerned with is that the pity, unlike the litmus papers, becomes rancid. Simile is becoming something like a vice when it begins, as it does here, to breed appendages like the knowing "lab assistant" and forces such awkward rhetoric in order to conceal the too frequent repetition of *like*. Dr. Johnson, in a famous passage, said the last word on this kind of thing:

... their amplification had no limits; they left not only reason but fancy behind them; and produced combinations of confused magnificence, that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined. Yet great labor, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truths; ... To write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and think.

There are many of these unexpected truths in Mr. Shapiro's book; they come mainly in those poems where he has not consciously sought a metaphysical structure but has followed the suggestion of his title and achieved a loose kind of order by virtue of the fact that everything the poem says is about the same person, place or thing. In such poems Mr. Shapiro's sensitiveness and wit may freely take their ease. *The Twins* is a case:

Like ness has made them animal and shy.
See how they turn their full gaze left and right,
Seeking the other, yet not moving close;
Nothing in their relationship is gross,
But soft, conspicuous, like giraffes.

Probably the whole poem is necessary to show the nice adaption of technical means to ends here, but the fine balance of the off-rhymes in the second couplet of this quotation is a good example of it. It may be pedantic to complain about the bad grammar, which nevertheless does not improve the passage. There are a number of poems as good in this kind. Here, for example, is Poe:

What else were his codes
But diagrams of hideouts of the mind

Plugged up with corpses and expensive junk,
Prosoipopoeia to keep himself at bay?

To write on this plan it is indeed necessary to read and think.

A few reiterated themes emerge, some of them plainly "try-ons." There is the urban poet's usual sensitiveness to the lot of the poor, hatred for the sterile snobbery of the rich and scorn of the hard dullness of the middle classes. Much of this is saved from becoming merely skilful repetition by being combined with the one feeling which appears strong enough to curb the constant play of effervescent fancy; this feeling is a sense of the alien's exile and of the value of a rooted life. It is what gives the extra force to poems like *University*, *October*, and *My Grandmother*. The one poem in the book which has something like a fully developed tragic conflict of sentiment depends on it:

Devalued now for houses this property lacks all that reflected
A sweet slow century,
The ornate habits of another country,
The cast-iron lion and the mansard roof,
And of owners the self-quietus of ownership.

And then:

But north of the city in their English valleys
Their sons and daughters
Continue the management of a large inheritance
Of joy and fashion.

The particulars here may still be a little too reminiscent for assurance, but they are felt and controlled.

This, then, is a book which displays most of the faults and many of the virtues characteristic of the manner on which at least the American poets of the '40's seem to have settled. It displays them with enough energy to suggest that if Mr. Shapiro is not yet a poet perfectly made, he is clearly a poet born.

ARTHUR MIZENER

The Book of New Poems 1943: Edited by OSCAR WILLIAMS.
Howell, Soskin Publishers, Inc.

Editor Williams points out that this is an anthology of poems written during a war, war poetry—but not "propaganda to arouse patriotism."

Another way of saying it is that during a war a poet lives among other writers (correspondents, commentators, novelists) the way a merchant seaman does among Fighters, Strategists, Occupation Forces. Like the merchant seaman's a poet's weakly-armed, unpublicized position is his private pleasure. And, just as the guiltlessness of a water-contact bulks large to the merchant seaman, so does it to the contributors in this anthology. Water is invoked more often and more successfully than blood in this war-conscious book.

Thus George Barker's sailor-water situation:

"Then at this midnight as insistent as the bell
That bangs the sailor from his bed to Europe,
I see tomorrow grow in a tree of hope . . ."

And these lines are as good as any to suggest the rather loose suspense, feminine-ended, which induces his over-length, surrealistic-realistic elegies.

Brinnin's sense of guilt and/or error is also writ in water—by a sailor in the form of a “shifty limpet on his rocky shore.” As the “least pink shell upon a watery shelf,” he takes as little place in the poem as he does in biology. As such he is a fair case of Brinnin's unwillingness to deepen and extend a master image.

Musical Alex Comfort's *Hoc Est Corpus* and *The Atoll in the Mind* have a movement both luscious and solid:

“dumb teeth under clear waters, where no currents
fracture the coral's porous horn . . .”

His sailor is the mind itself, “the grey mind's candied points tend to the surface.” But “tend” is inexactly inexact.

Delmore Schwartz's form of water is, characteristically, snow—no, not snow, but moonlight that looks like snow. His selection from *Genesis* badly needs what goes before and after, seems like a high-toned version of an hour at Lindy's. But in “Freedom and silence shining in New York . . .” what a feeling for that nationwide place, where little that shines is either free or can stop sounding off! (The exclamation point is borrowed from Schwartz who has restored it to poetry from the beer-ads, and on his lines it looks very good.)

Before the water-trick breaks down entirely:

Spender's version of (snow-) water is:

“. . . I watched
The garden, falsified by snow,
Waiting to melt and become real again.”

The “falsified” is Spender's bravely continued attempt to locate Truth somewhere near Pleasure. From the Wallace Stevens' cellar is poured his usual, delayed-effect Scotch, containing water in a form suitable both to that propriety and to our Senator from The Other Side of the Moon: “gelid Januar has gone to hell.” And in Februar, “it is still ice.” Dylan Thomas reprints for water-watchers the grand, frog-panicky *In the Memory of Anne Jones* whose “fountain” heart once “fell in puddles round the parched world of Wales.” Marguerite Young's best (and one of the book's best) is about Noah. Cold-water man Yvor Winters, the sometimes insoluble solver of many a Winters critical evening, ends this *Winter Evening . . .* by moving down “coldly, solvent ways.” And Dunstan Thompson will be torn up for souvenirs by all true Hydrophiles. As Narcissus, Icarus, and Nautilus, his sailor-adventurer is equally skilled on the sea, under the sea, and in the air over the sea.

When the water is squeezed out of that catalog the names of most of the book's most interesting contributors remain. A poet who writes succulent novels sends his lines clicking in a Rockette pageant of Things and Nations to the nearest theatrical warehouse. Good Herbert Read is tired enough on this occasion to say aloud that “to fight without hope is to fight without grace,” which does not follow. Gascoigne makes a most unsurrealistic request for instrumental meaning in a human life. Muriel Rukeyser tries to say more things just for herself than she used to, is pestered by her old air of speaking for “Others.” Frost says that “One age is like another for the soul,” almost whimsically destroys the possi-

bility of such a judgment by asserting in the same poem that "We can't appraise the time in which we act." Then he wizards the piece beyond relativist cynicism in an exquisite personal close.

But at this point in the review of an anthology one is ready to begin all over again, desperately sure that any Thesis is a better place to start from than even a convenient, self-expanding aquacade. This is the place to say that Randell Jarrell's version of Orestes' death in Tauris, at the hands of his Greek-hating sister Iphigenia (Euripides had her save him) does carry off one of the most ambitious attempts in the book—in spite of sometimes labored imagery and blank verse. Because few of the contributors even promise to tell a story, his piece and Anne Ridler's lyric about her baby are a refreshment. For he is objectively telling a story about a hero unambiguously not himself; and Ridler is objectively recounting the experience of a hero unambiguously herself. Forced toward these modes the feelings in many of the other poems must have become either less real or more persuasive.

It is no curse to praise in this collection an optimistic undertone. What does "optimistic" mean? It means, in this case, that many of the pieces are wise to the difference between a social and an esthetic experience, that the strongest of these hopes are not betrayable either by the old badness of the War or the new goodness of the promised Pax.

REUEL DENNEY

On Native Grounds: ALFRED KAZIN. Reynal & Hitchcock.

Mr. Kazin's book, *On Native Grounds*, having by now been generally introduced, I shall here restrict myself to consideration of its bearing upon the development of critical method.

Whether we agree or disagree with Mr. Kazin's observations and evaluations in the case of a given author, we should generally agree that his kind of comment, like the field of literature on which he has chosen to comment, is well suited to reading at top speed. The appeal of his studies seems to reside in the fact that whereas his characterizations are average in their insight, they are offered with a conviction much above the average. One is continually invited to read his book in a state of total relaxation. Indeed, there is even a sense in which one can be tempted to read his comments on fiction with far less attention than readers usually give to the fiction itself; for in Mr. Kazin's book there is no thread of development to lose track of. Turn to any paragraph at random; and to get its full significance it is hardly even necessary to read the paragraph preceding. Nothing need be carried in the mind except the title of the book or author under discussion. His terms undergo no development that requires preparation. And in keeping with this method, Mr. Kazin never discusses the developmental aspects of the books on which he comments. That is, he never sets himself and his readers any problems in the exegesis of structure, as were he to be concerned with the attempt to decide what principles underlie the transformations of scene and action in a given story.

Similarly, though as his title indicates, he places his authors and their books against the background of the contemporary world, the correlations he observes between work and ground are of the most obvious sort, as when noting that a book is written about a financial depression because there was a financial de-

pression, or a given author's work is "sick" because the whole modern world is "sick," and so on. His environmentalist considerations rely exclusively on the most readily recognized counters: general references to the factory, the farm, business, possibilities of revolution, political and moral confusion, signs of hope, etc. These counters are used for purposes of quick characterization; and of course he simply ignores the many vexing problems to do with environmentalist criticism (problems the patient contemplation of which can be very illuminating even where definitive answers are impossible).

I am not even sure that much is gained by knowing the books Mr. Kazin discusses. At least, the sort of thing he says about them is the sort of thing one can readily follow without having read them. Which should remind us that the primary value of *On Native Grounds* is its value as a report, or survey. The author undertakes to read and characterize a great many books for us. He is at pains to give us an impression of their salient traits: what they are about, the point of view they embody, their kind of style, the writer's status. And by the very nature of this essentially impressionistic enterprise, Mr. Kazin automatically skirts the embarrassment of analytic criticism, (in both its formalist and environmentalist aspects), which must either assume in the audience a state of knowledge similar to the critic's (usually a false assumption), or assume that the audience will consult the text while reading the analysis (usually an equally false assumption), or expend a preponderant amount of time and effort on the sheer preparatory retailing of the work to be analyzed.

Impressionism too often presents you with an unitemized bill, in that it assigns qualities to a work without offering citations that verify the claims (as per the great delight one can take in Coleridge's way of criticism, while there is also a delight in the *precision* of qualifications that the Coleridge method makes for, a precision that is of course completely lacking in Mr. Kazin's procedure). Still, one must grant that Mr. Kazin's method has obvious advantages in a survey. Any great reliance upon sharp conceptualization with citation would have made an already long book much longer, since epithets are naturally summational, hence are the handiest way of "sizing up" a subject briefly. And besides, prose fiction does not readily lend itself to representative citation as does poetry (with which the Coleridge procedure works best), or as with purely conceptual literature (which one can review by quoting the basic propositions *verbatim*). A novelist usually does, of course, have passages that sum up his "philosophy," but these don't go far towards indicating the most important matter, his ways of developing a narrative. Dreiser's "chemism," for instance, is important mainly by reason of the fact that he violates it by giving us the portraits, not of chemicals, but of people. The central thing about it would not be something that could be represented by quoting a statement of the philosophy itself.

Mr. Kazin so consistently avoids the embarrassments of formalistic and environmentalist speculation by the devices of the reporter, that for his wind-up he writes of the W. P. A. guidebooks, thus giving us, not a summing-up of his own book, but a report on other books which are of such a nature that his report of them can be summarizing in quality. I cite this purely as a character trait. However, my statement was not quite accurate. For at the very end, following his survey of the state guides, he reports on the Van Wyck Brooks effusion against "coterie" writers; and confronting Mr. Brooks' unreasonableness, Mr.

Kazin is gratifyingly reasonable. He says that Mr. Brooks' animosity led him to miss "the laborious integrity of modern writers, their will to understand, to live, to create insofar as the world will allow them to." In such a chastened spirit Mr. Kazin might well have gone back and revised his treatment of his critical colleagues. Many of them he slew, but he didn't always leave them without first picking their pockets, both the environmentalists' and the formalists', as even his index will testify.

Stylistically, Mr. Kazin has one great fault. It is not so much the fault of any one sentence, but resides rather in the accumulation of such sentences. It also derives from his impressionism, hence from his reporting. And it takes the form of a sentence got by the tacking-on of impressions, one after the other. If the first impression does not quite cover the subject, the temptation is, instead of starting over again, to leave it, and revise simply by the addition of others, each of which in turn is revised not by omission but by further additions. Thus: "Yet something always remained: the shadow of the past on the land the Okies had left behind . . ." plus: "the land itself that lay everywhere ready to be discovered and reclaimed . . ." plus: "the framework of a whole American civilization . . ." plus: "richer and more curious than any in the depression generation knew . . ." plus: "greater than any crisis . . ." plus: "waiting and begging to be known." No one of these observations would be much to dwell upon, but if one races across them in a kind of blur, all told they establish a kind of tone, or attitude. They function not as analysis, but as a survey's variant of the Whitmanite catalogue.

At one point in his discussion of criticism, Mr. Kazin writes:

"The poet lived only for the perfection of his poem, as criticism lived only for the elucidation of that perfection. Hence Ransom's unforgettable remark on Wallace Stevens's *Sea Surface Full of Clouds*: 'The poem has a calculated complexity, and its technical competence is so high that to study it, if you do that sort of thing, is to be happy.' Hence his notation on the Macbeth soliloquy: 'I do not know why *dusty death*; it is an odd but winning detail.' Criticism had become expert at last; it had finally turned its full attention upon the poem itself; it missed nothing; it was stainless in motive, happy only to study the calculated complexity of those few poems whose technical competence was 'high.' It had become 'a sort of thing,' a game of devotions by knightly grammarians, and it made one happy."

The citation well illustrates what I would consider the great wastefulness of his literary policies, at least so far as the serious development of criticism is concerned. Rather than trying simply to give us an impression of Mr. Ransom's criticism, would it not be better to see that Mr. Ransom's perception does not go unused? Might one not, for instance, try to build upon it by the search for another step in the same direction? One might begin by noting, for instance, that death could be "dusty" for the same reason that ashes are consigned to ashes and dust to dust. Or one might depart from the fact that the two words are both so much alike in sound despite their differences. "Dusty death" is but a slight modification of the sound we'd get if we could speak of "duthy death," so that the adjective and the noun are almost identical in consonant structure but with different vowels. A great dramatist having put the words into a great soliloquy, and a perceptive critic having singled them out as a specially demar-

cated episode, the next step is not to strike a posture about it, but to see whether one can advance the matter a step farther by inquiring into the imagistic and tonal logic that may account for some of the appeal in the words.

One should want greatly to be happy at noting felicities wherever they may come, be they in rock formations, in the progress of a disease, in mathematics, or in rare poetry. And the most serious job of criticism is not, as with the reporter's survey, to look for suggestions that might in effect help to write the books over again, but to develop the resources of a *systematic conceptual analysis*. There is a place for Mr. Kazin's book: indeed, a quite reputable place, but only so long as he does not attempt to enforce upon criticism a method that would avoid the extremes of formalist and environmentalist criticism mainly by being too superficial and haphazard to go very far into either.

And rather than dismiss work of such obvious penetration as the formalists and environmentalists have produced, one should seek to develop a perspective that makes it more available by bringing its many aspects into closer relationship with one another; and one should work for the invention of critical concepts that will serve both to make the critical enterprise more methodical and to clarify its bearing upon the subject of human action in general.

KENNETH BURKE

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